



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™



## COVID-19

### IF YOU ARE FULLY VACCINATED

Find [new guidance for fully vaccinated people](#). If you are not vaccinated, [find a vaccine](#).

# People Experiencing Homelessness

Updated June 4, 2021

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## People experiencing homelessness are at risk of COVID-19.

Homeless services are often provided in congregate (group) settings, which could make the spread of infection easier. Because many people experiencing homelessness are older adults or have underlying medical conditions, **they may also be at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.**

Health departments and healthcare facilities should be aware that people experiencing homelessness are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Staff providing homeless services can help protect clients and other staff and slow the spread of COVID-19 by encouraging COVID-19 vaccinations and using [CDC's Guidance for Homeless Service Providers](#). If possible, identifying non-congregate settings where people at increased risk can stay may help [protect them from COVID-19](#).

For more detailed information and resources for homeless service providers, please visit [Resources to Support People Experiencing Homelessness](#).

## How to protect yourself from COVID-19 if you are experiencing homelessness

Many of the [recommendations to prevent COVID-19](#) may be difficult if you are experiencing homelessness. Although it may not be possible to avoid certain crowded locations (such as shelters), you should:

- Get a COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible. People who are fully vaccinated should review [CDC's Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People](#).
- [Wear a mask](#) over your nose and mouth, try to travel during less busy times, and [clean your hands](#) as soon as possible after a trip.

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as often as possible or use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available, and cover coughs and sneezes.
- If you are not fully vaccinated:
  - Wear a mask over your nose and mouth
  - Try to avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces
  - Maintain a physical distance of 6 feet (about two arm lengths) from other people
  - Prioritize grab-and-go food options or outdoor seating when dining if weather permits

## If people experiencing homelessness have symptoms

Any person experiencing homelessness with [symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#) (**fever, cough, or shortness of breath**) should alert their service providers (such as case managers, shelter staff, and other care providers). These staff will help the individual understand how to isolate themselves and identify options for medical care as needed.

## How to get tested for COVID-19

You can [access COVID-19 testing through a healthcare provider](#).

Local public health and healthcare facilities need to determine the best location for this testing in coordination with walk-in clinics and street medicine clinics. If you are unsure where to receive a test for COVID-19, ask shelter staff or your healthcare provider.

## Anyone sick with COVID-19 should stay isolated

If you have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, you should stay in a place where you can [isolate from other people](#) to prevent spreading the infection. Local health departments, housing authorities, homeless service systems, and healthcare facilities should identify locations to isolate people with known or suspected COVID-19 until you meet the [criteria to end isolation](#).

If no on-site isolation or alternative site isolation options are available, homeless service providers should plan for how they can help people isolate themselves while efforts are underway to provide additional support. If you need help identifying a place to stay isolated from other people, talk with shelter staff about what options you have.

# Donations of food and clothing to homeless service providers

Homeless service providers can accept donations of food and clothing during community spread of COVID-19, but [general infection control precautions](#) should be taken. Request that donors not donate if they are sick.

- **Set up donation drop-off points to encourage social distancing** between shelter workers and those donating.
- Launder donated clothing, sheets, towels, or other fabrics on high heat settings, and disinfect items that are nonporous, such as items made of plastic.
- Food donations should be shelf-stable, and shelter staff should take usual [food-related infection prevention precautions](#) [↗](#).

# Symptom screening of clients at homeless shelters

Homeless shelters may [screen you for symptoms](#) of respiratory infections.


If you have symptoms, you may or may not have COVID-19. If you have symptoms, you may be asked to stay elsewhere in a shelter or at a separate, off-site facility from other clients until you can receive a test for COVID-19. An on-site nurse or other clinical staff can help with care for symptoms.

If you are experiencing [COVID-like symptoms](#) (such as **fever, cough, or shortness of breath**), you should alert your service providers (case managers, shelter staff, and other care providers). These staff members can help you understand how to isolate and identify options for medical care as needed.

# Keeping open homeless shelters and encampments

Homeless shelters serve a critical function in our communities. **Shelters should stay open** unless homeless service providers, health departments, and housing authorities have determined together that a shelter needs to close. You should still be able to receive essential services at homeless shelters.


**More details:**

- [Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers](#)
- [Checklist for Homeless Service Providers During Community Re-opening](#)
- [COVID-19 Infection Control Inventory and Planning \(ICIP\) Tool for Homeless Service Providers](#)  [20 Pages, 426 KB]

**Printable Resources for People Experiencing Homelessness**

[How to Protect Others from COVID-19 in Shelters: During Meals](#)  [1 page, 268 KB]

[How to Protect Others from COVID-19 in Shelters: In General Sleeping Areas](#)   
[1 page, 173 KB]

[How to Protect Others from COVID-19 in Shelters: When to Wear a Mask](#)   
[1 page, 473 KB]

[What to Do When Sick](#)  [1 page, 797 KB]

[Social Distancing](#)  [1 page, 621 KB]

[Symptoms](#)  [1 page, 368 KB]

[How to Help Take Care of Someone Who is Sick](#)  [1 page, 247 KB]

[How to Protect Yourself](#)  [1 page, 260 KB]

[Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#)

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